

Frank deJong, Green Party of Ontario  
PO Box 50014  
224 Queen St W.  
Toronto, ON M5V 1Z6

Howard Hampton, New Democratic Party of  
Ontario  
101 Richmond Street East  
Toronto, ON,  
M5C 1N9

Dalton McGuinty, Liberal Party of Ontario  
1587 Bank Street,  
Ottawa, ON  
K1H 7Z3

John Tory, Progressive Conservative Party of  
Ontario  
1100 Eglinton Ave. East  
Toronto, ON  
M3C 1H6

**Re. Cost of a Nutritious Food Basket**

---

On behalf of member Medical Officers of Health, Boards of Health and Affiliate organizations of the Association of Local Public Health Agencies (alPHa), I am writing to each of you as the leaders of Ontario's major political parties to ask for your response to a call for action on access to healthy food.

The association between poverty and poor health is irrefutable. The inability to afford a nutritious diet is an obvious factor. It is one for which relatively clear government policy interventions can have a direct and immediate impact.

Each year, health units across Ontario are required by provincial law to determine and report the costs of 66 different foods that meet Health Canada's recommendations for a healthy diet. The Cost of a Nutritious Food Basket (CNFB) is a measure of the cost of healthy eating in each Board of Health jurisdiction. alPHa conducted a survey (attached) that clearly indicates that this cost has been increasing steadily:

- The 2007 provincial average CNFB for a family of four for one week rose by 3.3% over the last year. In Toronto, it was 7%. In Waterloo, it was over 10%. In Northwestern Ontario, where costs are already by far the highest in the province, it was over 4%.
- The provincial average CNFB for a family of four for one week has risen steadily since 2003, from approximately \$123.05 to \$135.39, or just over 10%.
- Annual increases to the local CNFB are becoming the norm, with 90% of survey respondents reporting that the CNFB is higher in 2007 than in 2006. By way of comparison, only 52% reported CNFB increases in 2004 over 2003.

We know that proper nutrition is a key to improving health. With the CNFB data from all health units, we also know what proper nutrition costs. When this is considered alongside the costs of other basic necessities, it is very clear that minimum incomes in Ontario are inadequate.

In 2005, alPHa urged the provincial government to review Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program rates and the minimum wage from a health perspective and to set allowances for basic needs and shelter be based on actual current representative costs. This resolution is also attached.

How does your party plan to use the data from the CNFB to ensure access to sufficient nutritious food for all Ontarians? We look forward to a response that we can share with our members prior to Election Day.

Thank you in advance,

Vance Blackmore,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Vance L. Blackmore".

President

**Copy: Chairs, Ontario Boards of Health  
Ontario Medical Officers of Health  
Nick Saul, Executive Director – STOP Community Food Centre**

## 2005 alPHa Resolution A05-18

**TITLE** Adequate Nutrition for Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program Participants and Low Wage Earners

**SPONSOR:** Council of Ontario Medical Officers of Health

**WHEREAS** the 2001 alPHa RESOLUTION NO. A01-19 - Ontario Works Allowances and Adequate Nutrition endorses that “the Government of Ontario be urged to review and ensure that the Basic Allowance portion of Ontario Works Financial Assistance allows for adequate nutrition”;

**WHEREAS** The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care recommends that information about the cost of a Nutritious Food Basket be used on an ongoing basis to promote and support policy development to increase access to nutritious food;

**WHEREAS** in 1995, Ontario Works (OW) allowances were reduced by 21.6%, Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) allowances were frozen, and both have since been increased by only 3%;

**WHEREAS** these reductions to social assistance rates, combined with a 20% increase in inflation since 1995, have resulted in a decrease of 35% in the purchasing power of OW participants;

**WHEREAS** a family of four receiving OW benefits is eligible to receive a maximum allowance of \$1,215.00 per month to cover all expenses including food, rent, utilities, clothing and other necessities;

**WHEREAS** the maximum minimum wage paid to an experienced adult worker in Ontario is \$7.45 per hour and this rate is only expected to increase to \$8.00 per hour in 2007. A full-time worker (40 hrs/week) can be expected to earn \$1,222.00 per month to cover all expenses including health care costs in the absence of employer-provided health benefits;

**WHEREAS** in 2004, the average rent for a two-bedroom apartment in Ontario represents a substantial portion of these monthly earnings (e.g. \$655.00 per month in the City of Greater Sudbury and \$1,052.00 in the City of Toronto);

**WHEREAS** Nutritious Food Basket measures continue to indicate that the Basic Allowance portion of OW and ODSP payments is unlikely to provide for adequate nutrition for individuals and families after shelter costs are taken into account. For the province of Ontario, it cost an average of \$122.83 per week in 2004 to feed a reference family of four, an increase of over 10.5% since 2000;

**WHEREAS** 322,911 individuals visited Ontario food banks in 2004, representing a 5% increase in food bank use since 2003, and it is known that 54% of Canadians who visited food banks reported social assistance as their primary source of income;

**WHEREAS** recent grassroots efforts supported by many health care providers to exploit the Special Diet Supplement for OW and ODSP participants represents a desperate measure that illustrates the depth of concern over the adequacy of social assistance levels for basic nutritional requirements;

**WHEREAS** adequate nutrition is essential for proper growth and development as well as a significant factor in preventing many chronic diseases including cancer;

**NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT** the Government of Ontario be further urged to review the adequacy of Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program rates from a health perspective and that allowances for basic needs and shelter be based on actual current representative costs;

**AND FURTHER THAT** the Government of Ontario be urged to review the current minimum wage from a health perspective and establish a living wage for all Ontario workers



## Nutritious Food Basket Survey

### FINAL Report

Update: September 21, 2007

---

For more information contact:

Linda Stewart  
Association of Local Public Health Agencies  
502-425 University Avenue  
Toronto, ON M5G 1T6  
416-595-0006 x 22  
[linda@alphaweb.org](mailto:linda@alphaweb.org)



Nutritious Food Basket Survey

# FINAL Report

## Introduction

The irrefutable association between low levels of income and poor health has been and continues to be clearly demonstrated throughout society, from the community to the global levels. While income is but one of a roster of social and economic determinants of health, it is one for which relatively clear government policy interventions can have a direct and immediate impact.

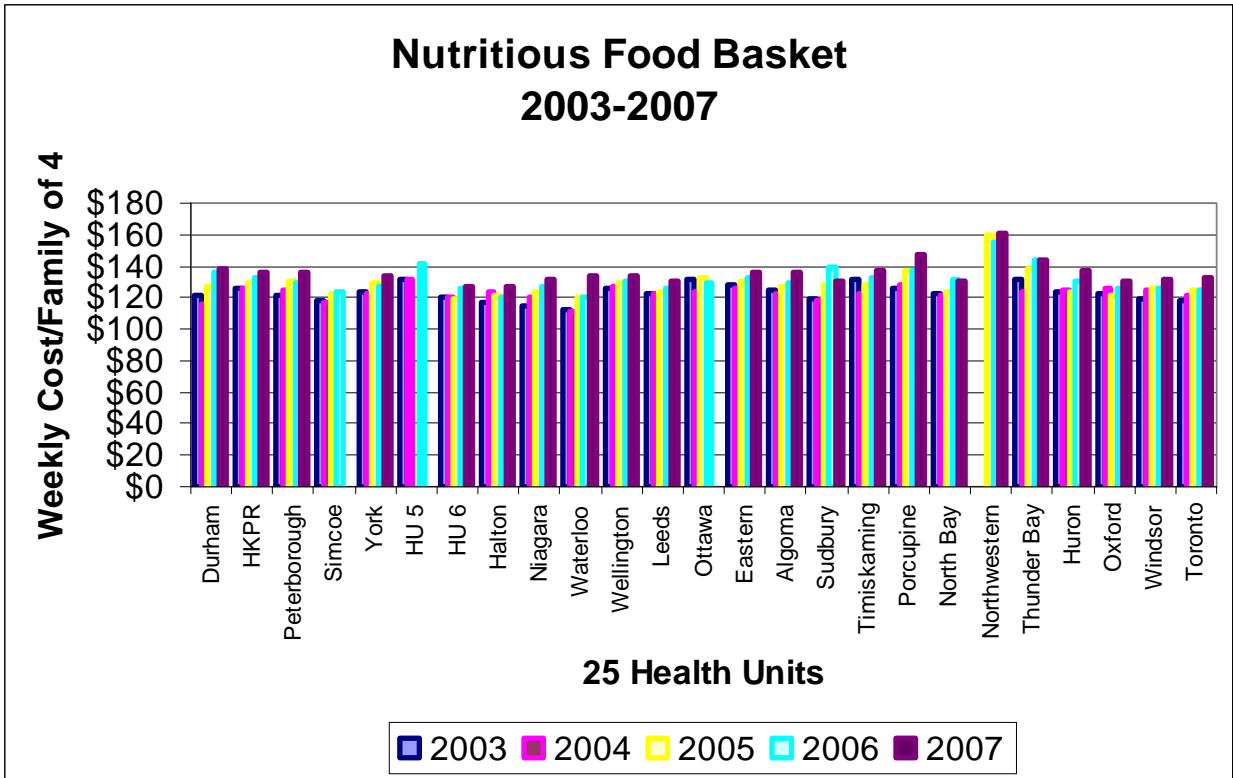
aPHa as an association and its individual members have been continually advocating for such interventions, including immediate increases to the minimum wage, disability and social assistance payments, and ending the National Child Benefit Supplement claw back.

In 2001, aPHa passed a resolution calling on the Government of Ontario to review and ensure that the Basic Allowance portion of social assistance payments allowed for adequate nutrition. Everyone has the right to enough nutritious food to eat. In 2005, aPHa further resolved to urge that the adequacy of Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program rates and the minimum wage be reviewed from a health perspective and that allowances for basic needs and shelter be based on actual current representative costs.

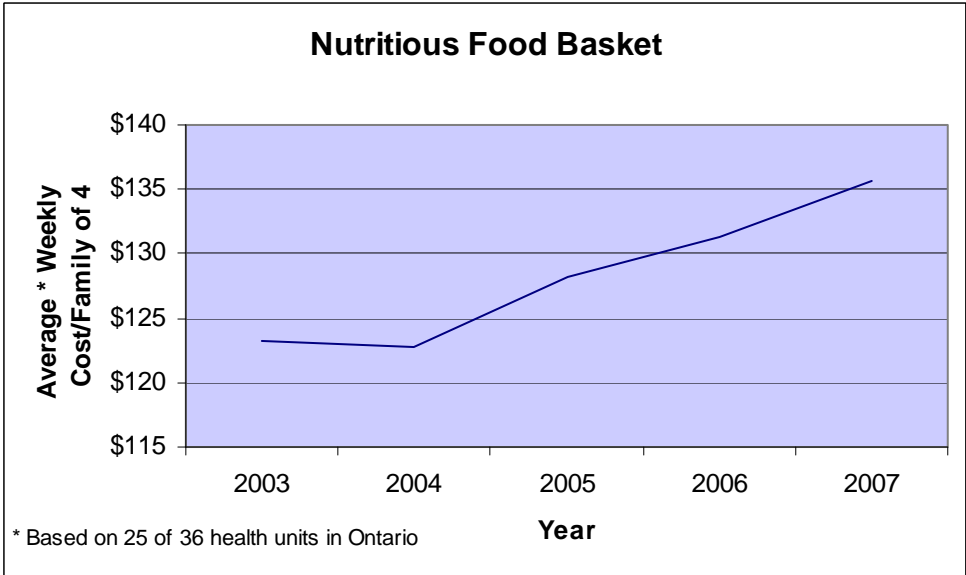
## Survey Results

Public Health Units (PHUs) in Ontario calculate the cost of a nutritious food basket for their area on an annual basis. In this survey, all PHUs were asked to provide the cost of the nutritious food basket for the last 5 years for a family of four. 25 of the 36 health units responded and all said that they would like to support provincial advocacy with local advocacy. While we may continue to receive responses from the remaining health units, the 25 respondents represent a good cross-section from all 7 regions across the province.

The following chart summarizes the nutritious food basket weekly cost information received for a family of four.



Overall, the average weekly cost to feed a family of 4 has increased steadily from \$123.18 in 2003 to \$135.61 in 2007.



The following table contains the average weekly cost of a nutritious food basket for a family of four as determined by the participating health units. The average weekly cost for 2007 is \$135.61. This represents an average increase of 3.3 percent over 2006 costs. The increase over 5 years has been 10 percent. *(Please note, at the time of publication, permission to use health unit names in this report has not been received from all participants.)*

Survey Data	Region	Health Unit	2007	2006	2005	2004	2003
	Central East	Durham	\$137.93	\$135.74	\$126.65	\$115.92	\$121.50
	Central East	HKPR	\$135.96	\$132.80	\$129.37	\$126.05	\$126.26
	Central East	Peterborough	\$136.62	\$129.91	\$130.54	\$124.64	\$121.36
	Central East	Simcoe		\$123.95	\$122.85	\$116.82	\$118.13
	Central East	York	\$134.09	\$127.38	\$129.11	\$123.04	\$124.11
	Central West	HU 5		\$142.16		\$132.14	\$131.56
	Central West	HU 6	\$126.76	\$126.53	\$119.30	\$120.91	\$120.73
	Central West	Halton	\$127.02	\$120.89	\$120.96	\$123.20	\$117.45
	Central West	Niagara	\$131.07	\$126.78	\$123.24	\$120.32	\$114.68
	Central West	Waterloo	\$133.35	\$120.78	\$120.06	\$111.91	\$112.58
	Central West	Wellington	\$133.67	\$130.97	\$129.55	\$126.99	\$125.65
	Eastern	Leeds	\$130.65	\$126.48	\$123.30	\$122.76	\$123.09
	Eastern	Ottawa		\$129.88	\$132.96	\$123.78	\$132.15
	Eastern	Eastern	\$136.28	\$132.20	\$130.61	\$126.00	\$128.00
	North East	Algoma	\$135.95	\$129.06	\$126.85	\$122.72	\$124.65
	North East	Sudbury	\$130.89	\$139.93	\$128.73	\$117.82	\$118.91
	North East	Timiskaming	\$137.62	\$132.19	\$127.89	\$123.01	\$131.43
	North East	Porcupine	\$147.57	\$137.09	\$137.20	\$128.45	\$126.22
	North East	North Bay	\$130.65	\$131.41	\$123.82	\$121.91	\$122.71
	North West	Northwestern	\$161.00	\$154.72	\$159.63		
	North West	Thunder Bay	\$143.96	\$143.79	\$138.90	\$123.24	\$131.38
	South West	Huron	\$137.11	\$130.98	\$123.64	\$124.62	\$123.80
	South West	Oxford	\$130.24	\$125.50	\$122.00	\$126.00	\$123.00
	South West	Windsor	\$131.99	\$125.76	\$125.46	\$124.50	\$118.81
	Toronto	Toronto	\$133.04	\$124.35	\$124.62	\$120.95	\$118.24
Average Weekly Cost:			\$135.61	\$131.25	\$128.22	\$122.82	\$123.18
Annual % increase:			3.32%	2.36%	4.39%	-0.29%	
Increase over 5 years:			10.09%				
High			\$161.00	\$154.72	\$159.63	\$132.14	\$132.15
Low			\$126.76	\$120.78	\$119.30	\$111.91	\$112.58
High/Low Difference (#)			\$34.24	\$33.94	\$40.33	\$20.23	\$19.57
High/Low Difference (%)			27.01%	28.10%	33.81%	18.08%	17.38%

The following table contains the percentage change in the average weekly cost of a nutritious food basket for a family of four for the participating health units. 90 percent of the participants experienced an annual increase in the average weekly cost between 2006 and 2007.

<b>Percentage Increases</b>	<b>Region</b>	<b>Health Unit</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>2003</b>
	Central East	Durham	1.61%	7.18%	9.26%	-4.59%	
	Central East	HKPR	2.38%	2.65%	2.63%	-0.17%	
	Central East	Peterborough	5.17%	-0.48%	4.73%	2.70%	
	Central East	Simcoe		0.90%	5.16%	-1.11%	
	Central East	York	5.27%	-1.34%	4.93%	-0.86%	
	Central West	HU 5				0.44%	
	Central West	HU 6	0.18%	6.06%	-1.33%	0.15%	
	Central West	Halton	5.07%	-0.06%	-1.82%	4.90%	
	Central West	Niagara	3.38%	2.87%	2.43%	4.92%	
	Central West	Waterloo	10.41%	0.60%	7.28%	-0.60%	
	Central West	Wellington	2.06%	1.10%	2.02%	1.07%	
	Eastern	Leeds	3.30%	2.58%	0.44%	-0.27%	
	Eastern	Ottawa		-2.32%	7.42%	-6.33%	
	Eastern	Eastern	3.09%	1.22%	3.66%	-1.56%	
	North East	Algoma	5.34%	1.74%	3.37%	-1.55%	
	North East	Sudbury	-6.46%	8.70%	9.26%	-0.92%	
	North East	Timiskaming	4.11%	3.36%	3.97%	-6.41%	
	North East	Porcupine	7.64%	-0.08%	6.81%	1.77%	
	North East	North Bay	-0.58%	6.13%	1.57%	-0.65%	
	North West	Northwestern	4.06%	-3.08%			
	North West	Thunder Bay	0.12%	3.52%	12.71%	-6.20%	
	South West	Huron	4.68%	5.94%	-0.79%	0.66%	
	South West	Oxford	3.78%	2.87%	-3.17%	2.44%	
	South West	Windsor	4.95%	0.24%	0.77%	4.79%	
	Toronto	Toronto	6.99%	-0.22%	3.03%	2.29%	
	High		10.41%	8.70%	12.71%	4.92%	
	Low		-6.46%	-3.08%	-3.17%	-6.41%	
	# HUs with Increases:		19	17	19	12	
			90%	71%	83%	50%	
	# HUs with Decreases:		2	7	4	12	
			10%	29%	17%	50%	

#### Areas of Concern

The following comments were provided by respondents regarding issues that are important to consider when looking at the nutritious food basket and food security issues in Ontario.

1. “Ideally, the focus should be on actions that address the underlying causes of food insecurity, such as income adequacy and affordable housing.”
2. “We would ask you to consider shelter and utility rates in your assessment, since these costs erode the Basic allowance.”
3. “Need to revise the costing protocol in light of the new food guide recommendations. Community vs individual food security and the scope of interventions (upstream and downstream is not well understood, awareness is low). Health units need more support and resources to address food security and social determinants of health.”
4. “When calculating your nutritional allowance, take into account Health Canada’s recommendations for a multivitamin with .4 mg folic acid for women of childbearing age and 400 IU of vitamin D for people over 50 year of age.”
5. “Also concerned about the working poor. What advocacy efforts can be put forward concerning minimum wage? Can we capitalize on data collected for this initiative?”
6. “Food is the fluid cost, and other bills get paid out of food money, leaving less for families to use to get enough food to eat.”

## Conclusion

The adequacy of a living wage and social assistance rates must be measured against the costs of adequate nutrition (as determined by Boards of Health through the provincial Cost of a Nutritious Food Basket protocol), shelter, transportation, clothing, personal care and other basics. To be unable to meet these costs is to live in poverty, which many argue is the most significant barrier to good health.

---

The Association of Local Public Health Agencies (aLPHa) is a non-profit organization that provides leadership to the 36 Boards of Health and Public Health Units in Ontario. Our members include board of health members, medical and associate medical officers of health, and senior public health managers in each of the public health disciplines – nursing, inspections, nutrition, dentistry, health promotion, epidemiology and business administration.